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## ENGLISH LACE BOBBINS AND THEIR HISTORY.

### *A BRIEF OVERVIEW*

By Brian Lemin

#### *INTRODUCTION.*

The oldest lace bobbin found in England dates from the late 1600s or early 1700s. It is bone and clearly turned on a lathe having inscribed rings as its main decoration, finishing with a ball at the bottom. What is most interesting about this bobbin is the neck. The neck is quite long and has a collar about half way up the neck. Why this is so interesting is that in this bobbin we can see the early evolution of what has become almost a unique feature of the bobbins from the East Midland area of England, the double neck.



England's Oldest Bobbin?

The picture is my copy of the bobbin.

(Morris 1988)

***THE PARTS OF A BOBBIN.***

Rather than use a lot of text to describe the parts of the bobbin, the information is best conveyed through a diagram.



The parts of a Bobbin.

***THE LACE BOBBINS******EAST MIDLANDS BOBBINS.***

Three types of English bobbins have characteristic single necks. These the South Bucks bobbins the Honiton and the Downtown bobbins. These will be discussed later. But the characteristic of the East Midland bobbin is that it has a double neck and is spangled.

There are no firm sizes for lace bobbins. Certainly different types of bobbins are generally close to each other in size, but even then the sizes can vary within types. A typical East Midland bobbin would measure about 100 mm with a diameter of about 6mm. The neck would be about 15 mm but modern bobbins have necks closer to 25 mm.

They can be made from wood (mostly), bone, brass, and more rarely pewter,



silver and ivory. There are some examples of other materials in existence also. The woods that were used were mostly those that were available locally. The fruit woods figure high in most lists of woods used for bobbins.

For the most part they were made on a treadle lathe, the revolutions being obtained by a cam and a wheel that was operated by the turners foot, rather like the treadle sewing machines that some readers might remember. For a modern turner, operating one of these is very difficult and it is a credit to the turners skill of those times that they created such lovely bobbins with such a primitive tool.

Bobbins were also hand carved and many examples of these are in existence, many are quite crude but others are extremely well carved.

The decoration of these bobbins varies from the very plain to the most ornate and colourful. They must rank amongst the most beautiful hand tools of any craft industry. It is this variety and beauty that makes them attractive to users and collectors alike.

## HONITON LACE BOBBINS.

We now move geographically to the county of Devonshire in the South West of England. The name Honiton given to these bobbins relates more to the fact that the town of Honiton was on the London route. Certainly Honiton lace was made there but it was also made in many of the villages and towns in the surrounding areas.



## A Honiton Bobbin, stained with Aqua Fortis.

The type of lace made in this area is different from the types made in the East Midlands. One of the significant differences that relate to the style of bobbin is that the Honiton lace requires *sewing*. That is the bobbin has to be passed through the lace, something that is not required in the laces made in the East Midlands. This accounts for the fact that these bobbins are not spangled. They also have a single neck and the decoration is such that it will not hamper the passing of the bobbin through the delicate lace. Thus they are mostly rather plain bobbins but they are decorated with rings, stains, sealing wax and ornate incised carvings. So there are many quite attractive and collectable Honiton bobbins.

I should mention here that there are two basic types of Honiton bobbins, one that is more pointed than the other. The above illustration is of a blunt type.

## SOUTH BUCKS. BOBBINS

The term "South Bucks." is a shortening of South Buckinghamshire, an English County. The bobbins from this area are single necked, bulbous bodies and a characteristic collar that I find hard to describe in words. Have a look at the picture, and unless the collar has those characteristics it is not a South Bucks bobbin.





## South Bucks bobtail and trolley with pewter ring.

These bobbins have varied decoration. The pewter ring is quite common as is domino spots of contrasting woods. They have a larger bobbin that is called a Thumper. It is thought that this style of bobbin is very close to the original bobbins used in England prior to the development of the East Midland style of lace bobbin. They are unspangled

## DOWNTON BOBBINS

These bobbins are unique to the Salisbury area (Wiltshire) and are shorter and fatter than the East Midland bobbins. Some are a little more angular (i.e. they are not quite so curvaceous) than the South Bucks bobbin, but have a basic similarity. The difference is that instead of a bulb the shaft goes down to a point. The decoration is mainly that of designs drawn on them but they do have inscribed rings also. They are unspangled.



Downtown bobbin

## MALMESBURY BOBBINS.

These are very similar to Honiton bobbins but do not always have distinct neck and are squared off at the bobbin. They have a single neck and on the whole they are plain. The most decoration they have is of a few inscribed rings. Malmesbury is in the Northern area of Wiltshire.



A Malmsbury bobbin (Collection of JB)

## OTHER NAMES.

Occasionally one finds bobbins that are not particularly distinctive from the main types above called by the names of the area in which they were used. A good example of this, though rarely used is Weddesdon bobbins. The Saunders Brothers were makers of South Bucks bobbins in that area, probably the northernmost area where these bobbins were made. Bedfordshire bobbins were used all over the East Midlands and this generic term has basically supplanted the name of Bedfordshire bobbins. However, some have put forward a case for the Bedfordshire bobbins, whilst conforming to the basic East Midland bobbin, were thinner and more delicate in nature. I have no evidence to back this up.

## HAND CARVED BOBBINS

There is also a well-established tradition of hand-carved bobbins, some of which are very elaborate and most of which are very acceptable gifts as they were intended to be.



Hand Carved Church Window (Collection NT)

## ***BOBBIN TYPES***

The following are Freeman's Classification of Lace Bobbins.

## PLAIN AND DECORATED BOBBINS

### Class

1 Dumps or Bobtailed.

2 Cow-in-Calf or Jack-in-the-Box

3 Trolly or Bedfordshire Trailers

4 quills.

5 Yak

7 Plain Shank

8 Turned Shank

9. Incised Decoration

10.Banded

11Coloured

12Mottled

13 Bedfordshire Tigers

14 Bedfordshire Leopards

15 Butterflies

16 Pewter Inlay.



17 Tallies

18 Bitted

19 Spliced

20 Sectioned.

21 Wired

22 Wire-beaded

23 Tinsel

24 Mother-in-Babe

25 Bird-cage

### ***GEOGRAPHY AND BOBBINS, AN OVERVIEW.***

Looking at a map of England before the local government revisions of County boundaries there are three main lace areas.

In Devon the main towns were Axminster, Axmouth beer, Branscombe Clyford Ottery St. Mary Seaton, Shute, Sidbury and Sidmouth. Lace was, of course also made in Honiton, the main to reason that this lace was called Honiton lace is because it was the place where the mail coach started for London. (I.e. collected for export). The lace made in Devon was a very fine lace at we know as Honiton lace and not the so called trolley lace (i.e., lace where the threads move backward and forwards right across the lace to form a continuous edging, or whatever, as in Torchon or Bucks. Point.) Which was made elsewhere. There is also second kind of lace made this area, that of Branscombe point, which is not a bobbin lace.

Of the lace making industry in Wiltshire, the most important of the minor lace-making centre was Downton, where certain distinctive patterns were made.



These were Torchon or Bucks. In style, and they sometimes contain a distinctive feature of half stitch diamonds in the ground of Bucks. Point. Distinctive bobbins, (like the Honiton ones only shorter and fatter) were used and these were known as a dump.

The other important minor centre was Coggeshall where a form Tambour lace was made on linen with a Tambour frame and move (not with bobbins)

East Midland. This term covers a fairly large area and in lace making circles covered several counties, namely Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire. Bucks and Beds would be the most important historically, and there is quite some rivalry between counties. This is possibly the reason for lace terminology developing separately in the two counties, most notably between Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire so that, for example, the pillow horse which is the stand that supports the lace pillow is known as a “maid” in Bedfordshire and as a “lady” in Buckinghamshire. The two names, or their abbreviations Beds and Bucks, have come to mean to different kind of lace. Bucks point is a very fine lace many bobbins and often beautiful floral patterns, which was made throughout the area originally. After the invention of the lace making machine Beds, which is a made of plaits, and trails, like Maltese and Cluny, was introduced to speed up the lace making process for workers trying to compete with the machine made lace. Later still Torchon lace was introduced throughout the area in a further account to speed the hand made lace process up. It is certainly not true that Beds lace was made exclusively in Bedfordshire and Bucks point in Buckinghamshire.

So far as the term South Bucks. is concerned, it can be seen from the map that the county narrows just below its centre (measured North/South). The county town of Aylesbury is situated in the centre (measured East/West) where there are main stately homes, and where the people worked mainly on growing cherry orchards, (it is the main cherry growing area the British isles) and in furniture making. Many of the lighter wood South Bucks bobbins are made from off cuts of wood that were being used for the making of items such as chair legs. North of Aylesbury the county changes to a less densely populated, more pastoral farming

area that is still countryside. The South Bucks area was where South Bucks bobbin were used, but there was no difference in the lace made with them and the lace made with spangled bobbins.

The Downton, South Bucks and Honiton bobbins were used in the areas named. The Bedfordshire bobbins in the whole of the rest of the Eastern Midlands including North Bucks. The Saunders Brothers of Waddesdon, a few miles north West of Aylesbury, were the northern most makers of bobbins for lace.

Whilst lace was made in many locations in the British Isles, it would appear that it was the strongest in the East Midlands and South Devon. Types like Waddesdon and Malmsbury bobbins were named after the places in which they were used. Whilst the four main types of bobbins, the Bedfordshire bobbin the Honiton bobbin the Downton bobbin and the South Bucks bobbin are named after areas which they mainly used they were certainly not used exclusively in these areas. Other distinctive bobbins are York; a lead weighted heavy bobbins, and Cottier, a continental bobbins that has a reel inside the shank upon which the thread is wound. The thread is thus protected and kept clean.

The Honiton bobbin is single necked, un-spangled, plain and pointed either sharply or blunt, because the thread used Honiton lace is so fine that it would break when attempting many “sewings” used in Honiton lace, which would involve joining two parts of lace together by passing a loop of thread from one part through the other and securing it by passing the thread and the bobbin through the loop and putting it up to tighten it. If spangled or heavy bobbins were used for this process the thread would keep breaking.

The Honiton bobbin was often called a lace stick or just stick though this has been challenged in recent years. South Bucks. is the home of another type of bobbin that is short and stumpy, as compared to the Bedfordshire bobbin. They are sometimes called Huguenots or thumpers as are most large English bobbin.

## ***SPANGLES***



The conventional wisdom is that spangles appear to have introduced when machine made thread was manufactured because it was so tightly wound the lace maker have to find a way to stop it from unwinding and fraying. So they put the ring of beads on them with now call spangles.

East Midland or Bedfordshire bobbins (which are the same bobbin) have a spangle of beads at the bottom of the shank. These are a ring of anything from two to 16 beads or other object, threaded on a brass wire and affixed to the bobbin either through a hole drilled in the shank or a staple fixed into the bottom of the bobbin. These added weight to the bobbin and prevented the bobbins from rolling around the pillow. Spangles and spangling are a separate topic and will not be addressed in this context.

The very large spangles are Steeple Claydon spangles. Steeple Claydon is a village in North Bucks. where they were often used. The birdcage is a big heavy bead or some other object in the centre surrounded by a cage of brass wire threaded with little seed beads.

The very small bobbin without spangles which one occasionally sees are the very early bobbins. Spangling did not start to be introduced until about the 1790's. So early bobbins would not have spangles unless they have been added later. They are quite distinct from Downton dumps.

A standard spangle could be described as having a fancy bottom bead with three alternative clear and red square-cuts on either side and a smaller bead, on each side of the bobbin.

There is no end to the possible bobbins that you can find as one-off.

## ***ORNIMENTAL TURNING***

This term is not to be confused with the ornamental turning that is done by a special lathe, but rather those shapes that can be achieved on a standard lathe. It should be noted, however, that the turners of the 17<sup>th</sup>. century 18<sup>th</sup>. and 19<sup>th</sup>



century were using treadle lathes, that were propelled in a similar manner to the treadle sewing machine that we in the antique shops nowadays.

Both bone and wooden bobbins lent themselves to wonderful designs by their creator. The possibilities of bobbin decoration are almost without number. They can be decoratively turned or decoration added after turning. The materials used can be mixed in a variety of ways, both in the structure of the bobbin itself or in the after decoration. The turned decoration comprise grooves, V's coves and domes done with infinite variety.

Maker C. 3 made all the lovely complicated "bitted" bobbins with marquetry designs on was distinguished by the fact that he used a trepanning saw.

Honiton bobbins are generally plain with what decoration there may be confined to coloured grooves, staining with aqua fortis (nitric acid) (this staining can rarely be found on an East Midland bobbin) of line drawings of designs or objects. One particular design is known as Branscombe riggled. There is no ornamental turning on these bobbins as this would not be suitable core the use of the bobbin in the making of Honiton lace. They do not have spangles. Dated Honitons usually have very early dates sometimes well back into 1700's. Those that are decorated with red and black grooves are known as Branscombe riggled

East Midland bobbins vary in length from about 3.5 inches, though there are some that can be found both smaller and larger. A few yak bobbins are considerably larger, 5.5 or even six inches long, they are used for a heavy lace from wool.

Once again the conventional wisdom is that the first East Midland makers were French Protestant refugees 1572 after the massacre of St. Bartholomew, who settled in Cranfield. Others came following the revocation of the edict Nantes 1685 and during the French revolution 1789 onwards, and settled either in the East Midlands or South Devon.

## ***COLOUR ON BOBBINS***

There were two techniques used for colouring bobbins, either dyeing or staining. Stains are the application of transparent colours on to the surface of the object that still allows the grain of the wood to come through. Dyes on the other hand are applied mostly by soaking or boiling the object for a period of time. Dyes too often have the grain showing through the colour.

The early writers report that the bobbin makers used a variety of techniques to impart the colour. They boiled the bobbins in logwood chips, berry juices and other natural substances as well as chemicals such as copper arsenate, which imparted a grey colour that did not fade easily, potassium bichromate cochineal and gentian violet, which was a medicinal tincture that produces a bright violet colour.

Bone bobbins kept their colour best and they can still be found with very bright colours of red, green and purple. Wooden bobbins lose their colour quite quickly, but occasionally traces of colour can be found on the neck of the wooden bobbin, presumably because it was covered with thread and not exposed to the light.

The colouring of the whole bobbin was usually in one colour, but the colouring used for the inscriptions and dots were always in two (sometimes more) colours. The deciding choice of colour was the maker. Different makers favoured different colours or colour combinations. Bobbins often had two colours or had one colour with bands of the original material showing. The maker returned these bobbins to the lathe and turned away the dye to reveal the original bone or wood. There are some special colours that are in existence. An inscribed "Nelson" bobbin that is stained navy blue made by James Compton and another black bobbin with a black spangle that was clearly a mourning bobbin, this time made by Jessie Compton.

The makers preferred colours are:

**Bobbin Brown:** Red and Black, red and Yellow occasionally all three.

**Jessie Compton:** Red and blue or red and green.



James Compton: always red and blue.

Joseph Haskins: Red and Blue or red and green.

Maker A: Red and blue or red and black.

Maker B: Red and blue or red and green.

Maker C: On his rare bone bobbins occasionally uses red and black.

[Note: Maker A, B C and D. are from Springetts old classification]

When it comes to makers colouring the whole bobbin, Jessie Compton used green mostly as did maker D who sometimes added or used red in the decoration. I am aware of a Jessie Compton bobbin dyed brown. Of the known makers only James Compton appeared to dye wood bobbins.

(Note: The lace makers and bobbin collectors are indebted to Christine and David Springett for the research that has identified the makers mentioned above. Readers are urged to refer to their book Success to the Lace Pillow for more information on bobbin makers and indeed on lace bobbins as a whole.)

Most inscriptions were by coloured dots forming letters. the coloured dots were drilled and filled with the colouring material probably mixed with a glue like gum arabic. Most of the inscribed coloured bobbins in red and blue were made by James Compton.

On wood the best colours were yellow red and green. Most colours work well on bone except yellow.

You will rarely find a Japan Lacquered bobbin.

The most popular stain was aqua fortis (nitric acid) Colloquially known as “Agnes Forty”. This imparted a brown stain. It is mostly found on Honiton



bobbins. the staining can be in the form of irregular “blobs” or “artistic line designs. When originally stained the colour has a greenish tinge to it which turns brown with a little ageing. I question some of the reports of the aqua fortis giving a green hue to the bobbin and suspect that where there is a distinct green hue that this colouring was added as dye. I have now experimented for a few years with this and whilst I can see where the “green” description has a basis, I am far from convinced that the resulting colour from aqua fortis is green.

The decoration of Honiton bobbins uses red and black, occasionally red and blue. I have seen one Honiton bobbin that is black with lovely red inscription (a date) and design on it. There are many other most interesting "picture" designs on Honiton lace bobbins.

Mention should be made of the Honiton type bobbins that have a special decoration called “Branscombe riggled”. These bobbins have inscribed rings that are filled with coloured sealing wax, mostly red and black.

## ***INSCRIBED BOBBINS***

Bobbins, both wood and bone were very frequently inscribed with a variety of names messages etc. This was done by forming word by drilling and colouring holes in the bobbin, occasionally carving the letter with a pocket knife or similar instrument or by inserting brass pins or thorns in the shape of the letters and then sanding them back to the level of the bobbin shank.

Freeman has a good catalogue of these various types of inscriptions, an abbreviated copy of which follows.

## **INSCRIBED BOBBINS**

## (a) General Inscriptions

Inscribed bobbins were usually of bone, a few of wood, exceptionally of metal. They are mostly of class 7 in design, though occasionally of classes 9, 10, 11, 19 and 21. The inscription is almost invariably carried out in coloured drilled dots, though some incised and a very few painted examples exist. In the case of wooden bobbins it is also found punched in dots on applied or inlaid pewter bands, or picked out with inlaid or metal studs. Many, especially those with names, are dated.

### Type

1. Initials or pairs of initials
2. Christian name(s),
3. Relationships,
4. Names
5. Names and places
6. Names and occupations
7. Famous people
8. Royalty
9. Politicians and Elections

10. Murderers
11. Transportation
12. Suicide
13. Memorials
14. Birthdays
15. Historical events
- 16 Presentations:
  17. Curses
  18. Blessings
  19. Admonitions
    20. Biblical texts
    21. Pious phrases
    22. Apophthegms
    23. Popular songs and poems =
    24. Verses
    25. Alphabets
    26. Cryptograms
    27. Catches



28. Aspiration:
29. Invitation
30. Warning:
- 31 Flirtation
32. Protest
33. Question:
34. Proposal:
35. Refusal :
37. Acceptance:
38. Injunction:
39. Declaration
40. Plighted love

## ***DATING BOBBINS***

There is no reliable method of dating bobbins. The best is to be able to identify the maker, then you can reliably date the bobbin to the makers lifetime. Even dated bobbins are not reliable as they could have been made at any time. Political slogans have a degree of reliability, however these could have been used for a number of elections if the candidate had a lot made and carried them over tom the next election.

With regard to inscription the presence of a seraph on the letters would indicate 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There is one other hint. The small dainty bobbins were used for Bucks point lace in the early years of the lace industry. This type of lace needed many bobbins and lightweight too. They are, in their original state unspangled. It would appear that they are amongst the oldest bobbins surviving in any numbers.

## ***DECORATION ON LACE BOBBINS***

Decoration can be divided into the following headings:

Turned Decoration.

This is done on the lathe. There is an infinite number of variations that are possible, but in broad terms they are all variations of V's, grooves, beads, reels, concaves, hollows, coves, fillets, cylinders and so on, and so on. It is not the purpose of this article to discuss these in depth. Suffice to say that it is the forms of these shapes and the amalgamation of one shape with another that reveals the artist in the turner. The form must be pleasing to the eye, it must be practical and the bobbin must be durable.

For the most part the turners did not load the bobbins with a myriad of turned shapes they appeared to use a basic overall shape then overlaying upon this shape (say a taper) two may be three turned shapes that may well be repeated or will stand as a single design which when added to the others made the overall bobbin.

You can lay out a series of average type bobbins and observe a rough acceptance of the one-third rule with the collar transition and the neck forming one third and the shank being divided into the other two thirds. This is not an invariable rule but it appears to be a frequent design device.



Different makers had their favourite designs which part of the reason why some makers are able to be identified, though the most unique part of most makers are their double heads and tails.

Some designs such as spiral twists or tight spiral grooves, will not have been done on the lathe, rather they were carved/filed or in the case of the tight spiral grooves, cut on a simple jig.

## Colour

When a maker decided to colour his bobbins he traditionally soaked them in dye. At least part, or the whole of the bobbin being immersed in dye. Usually red, green or purple, sometimes with part cut away later on the lathe to reveal plain bone or wood beneath. . This dye was sometimes boiled wood chips or fruit juices.

## Inscribed

A bobbin that bears an inscription, message, saying, name and so on as a decoration, the letters being formed by a series of coloured, burnt or painted dots.

## Wire binding

A bobbin bound with fine brass wire. Occasionally the whole shank is covered but more often it is but a small sections (bands) connected with a continuing spiral along its length. The wire is recessed slightly into the bobbin so that it is level or just below the surface this makes it more comfortable to use. With

constant use the wire becomes highly polished and takes on a pleasant golden look. Brass wire is almost always used, rarely copper wire and rarely silver wire. The thickness used for this decoration is about 32 gauge, much thinner than the wire used for spangle which would be about 22 to 24 gauge. Bone bobbins are also decorated this manner and look "much more pleasant and attractive than the wooden ones". Coloured decorations often accompany the wire binding.

## Pewter inlay

A generic term to describe tigers, butterflies, leopards, leptigs, compound inlays, and other pewter inlays.

## Dots

Small depressions were made (drilled) in wooden or bone bobbins, usually in a decorative pattern or in the form of an inscription, and then coloured with powdered colour mixed with gum arabic or sometimes possibly with sealing wax dissolved in methylated spirits. Bobbins with this type of decoration are sometimes referred to as pique'd.

## Tinsel

An open spiral of brass wire holds the tinsel in place protecting it from wear yet allowing it to be clearly seen. Silver gold or coloured metallic paper such as used for wrapping chocolates was cut into thin strips and inserted into grooves cut in the shank.

## Pinned

Brass pins are driven into the shank and cut off level with the it. Similarly thorns were driven in to form a pattern, the name or initials of a persons name is formed see pinned bobbin

## Beaded



Decorated with small coloured beads threaded on wire and coiled round the shank. They are arranged to form a pattern, usually set into spiral or other grooves in the shank. There are various names for the bead designs. e.g. Chevron, Spiral, Vertical, Beaded Shank etc

## Bitted

An inlaid bobbin with slanting cuts made in the shank and the projecting pieces removed and replaced with similar sized pieces of bone or wood of another colour. Dark coloured wooden bobbins are inlaid with a light-coloured wood. Occasionally a light coloured bobbin inlaid with dark wood. Described as looking like small fingernails stuck into the side of the bobbin. This is because the cuts and insertions are constructed before the bobbin is turned (i.e., when it is square) When this is turned the straight cuts appear as fingernails or ticks, depending on how the "bits" are inserted into the shank. Another technique is to cut small segments from the shank and pieces of wood of contrasting colour stuck into the recesses formed. . An historical description is, "bits" or "slivers" of wood let into the surface of the shank in various interesting ways."

## Spliced

A bobbin made of more than one type of wood, or of wood or bone, joined together with a V or with a diagonal joint, often secured with rivets.

## *SPECIAL DESIGNS*

In addition to these standard design there were also a number of special designs. Amongst the best know are

## Cow and Calf

A wooden, bone, or occasionally brass bobbin in two parts which are joined with a screw or push fit. They have a hollowed shank containing a miniature bobbin, the calf, which is attached to the lower part of the bobbin. Sometimes called

Jack-in the- Box. Historical description. Outwardly looks quite plain but has a hidden secret. Pulled apart there is a tiny bobbin , the calf, attached to the bobbin tail end. Made in two sections, one fitting tightly into the other. The inside of the shank was hollow and contained a miniature bobbin. The small bobbin was joined on to the base of the top or bottom section. If made of brass, the two sections sometimes screwed together. Said by Wright to be a variety of the gold lace bobbin.

## Jack in the Box

A wooden or bone bobbin in two parts joining with a screw or push fit, and having a hollow shank containing loose miniature bobbin that jumps out ( falls) when it is opened. Sometimes called a Cow and(in) calf. See also, Secret bobbin, Cow and Calf.. The historical description is. Outwardly looks quite plain but has a hidden secret. Pulled apart there is a tiny bobbin .Made in two sections, one fitting tightly into the other. The inside of the shank was hollow and contained a loose miniature bobbin. If made of brass, the two sections sometimes screwed together. Some call a loose bobbin inside a Jack-in-the-Box and one that is attached to either the top or the bottom section a Cow in Calf

## Church Window bobbin.

A shank that is hollowed out leaving two or four (usually) longitudinal openings (slots) in the shank opposite each other; reminiscent of church windows. The openings are sometimes slanting. The hollow shank may have a variety of contents. Historically this appears to be a generic term for this type of hollowed shank, but it is often used to describe a church window shank without any contents. See also baby, lantern, porthole church window, and twisted chamber.

## ***BOBBIN MAKERS***

The bobbin makers that have been identified have been as the result of the excellent research done by Christine and David Springett. Readers are urged to read their book, Success to the Lace Pillow. This article will not go into the detail



of the manner of maker identification but will briefly identify those makers and some of their characteristics. I will be using the Springett names for these makers.

The bitted man. The Springetts do not feel that they have enough information on this man to name him. He is identifiable by his exquisite inlays of contrasting woods. These are inlaid in the "square" and then turned. This type of inlay is called "bitting" The Springetts date him between 1810 and 1820.

Jessie and James Compton. Jessie was James' father. Both have distinctive head and tails, but Jessie is known for his exquisite incised bone messages. They are truly a work of art. James could match his fathers skills but he is also known for his more plainly turned wooden bobbins. They were prolific bobbin turners and there would hardly be a collection of any size that would not include an example of one of the Compton's bobbins. Jessie lived until 1857 and James until 1889.

Joseph, David and Robert Haskins. This family of turners have produced, in my opinion, more of the most beautiful ornate and skilfully turned bobbins of any known maker. Bone was their favourite medium and they used every known turning and decorating device to produce these magnificent bobbins. Their bone loose rings, wire bindings, skill full use of coloured dots and pewter inlay were techniques that they perfected into producing the most artistic of lace bobbins.

Joseph lived until 1855, David and Robert were his sons. Joseph had to have been the best of three excellent turners.

Bobbin Brown had a range of turning skills that could be envied. He is perhaps known for his clean, simple inscriptions his domino spots and pewter inlay. He lived until 1872.

Arthur Wright was born in 1857 and his date of death is not known. The Springetts describe his work as being noted by his crudely inscribed bone bobbins that have heads and tails similar to those of Bobbin Brown. His wire spirals are also cut in a right-handed manner. It is felt that he may have been

taught bobbin making by bobbin brown.

The "blunt end man", who lived in the mid 19th century, had the habit of sawing off his tail ends and thus produced a characteristic blunt end from which he gets his name. His inscriptions are mostly horizontal.

Archibald Abbott 1815-1885. He is the only bobbin maker that stamped his name on his bobbins. Not all of them it is true. He is also known for his tight screw thread decoration. He is also known for his mother and babe bobbins that are characterised by the shape of his circular saw that he used to cut the windows. The window has a curved slot shape at each end.

We now come to Springetts numbered bobbin makers. That is they are unable to put a name to these makers but they have a distinctive style that can be identified.

Number One is distinctive as his inscriptions have straight-line construction (Like as if done with a penknife).

Number Two has distinctive head and necks and you will need to see Springett to get a picture of it.

Number Three. Probably the easiest feature of these bobbins is the thick tapered neck. There are other features too that need to be seen rather than described.

Number Four. He is known for his multi-incised lines and a figure known as the tomato sandwich. This is "two flat pieces of bread, followed by a whole tomato and then another two flat pieces of bread."

Saunders Bros. They produced the bobbins we now call Waddesdon bobbins.

J Harris and Son Ltd. Cockermonth. This firm manufactured a number of bobbins commercially and issued a catalogue. there are many different types that they produced.

E.P. Rose and Sons. Another 20th century manufacturer. There are notable



exceptions but they are very plain or simple bobbins. They did make copies of old bobbins and spangled them with antique beads. Some of these are quite nice.

At this stage I am going to stop this short review as we are now quite well into the 20th century and the bobbins become increasingly dull and unimaginative.

Typical of what happens when works of art become massed produced. At least in those days, as the modern massed produced bobbins are, on the whole, a great deal more artistic in their design. Indeed, it is only recently that I learned about the massed produced bobbins that are available. I had assumed that various turners had made them by hand. Not so!

## CONCLUSION.

This brief review can only be a quick sniff at the cork of the wonderful world of English Lace Bobbins. I have written it only to confirm to myself that I will need to write a book or at least a pamphlet on the subject. Those of you who have access to the net and have visited my web site, will see how each of these topics can (and need) to be expanded. Even then, there remains so much more to be learned about them and written about them.

I always invite correspondence on lace bobbin topics, especially if they bring some new "snippet" of information on some obscure or obvious aspect of bobbins. I am also always happy to answer your questions if I can.

Please feel free to write to me

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## REFERENCES.

Freeman, Charles. **Pillow Lace in the East Midlands**. Borough of Luton Museum an Art Gallery. 1958 Reprinted 1980.

An excellent booklet. Its main feature is an attempt to classify bobbins into classes and it seems to work well. There are three photographic plates, some of which have the same source as Bullocks book (Luton Museum!)

Both inscribed bobbins and the lace making equipment are well covered.

Hopewell, Jeffrey. **Pillow Lace and Bobbins**. Shire Publications. Princes Risborough. 1975. Reprinted 1994.

One of the valuable "Shire" publications that tackles "obscure" interests in a brief



but informative manner. Lace is covered sparsely but bobbins are well covered. The reader should be aware of some possible inaccuracies. The only publication that makes any attempt at looking at the topic of Continental lace bobbins. Good illustrations.

Huetson, T. L. Lace and Lace Bobbins. A history and Collectors Guide. David and Charles. Newton Abbot. 1973.

A book that attempts to cover the topic of lace and lace bobbins in some detail. I can not comment on the "lace" content but the bobbin content is well done. It is particularly strong in the area of inscribed bobbins.

Springett, Christine and David. Success to the Lace Pillow. Privately Published. C & D Springett. Rugby. 1981.

This book is at its best when discussing the makers of the bobbins. As the result of steadfast study, a number of makers have been identified either by name or by "letter" it also treats the inscribed bobbins well. Some valuable information on the historical approach to making bobbins. Not so much as other publications on the general treatment of bobbins.

Springett Christine and David. Spangles and Superstitions. C & D Springett Rugby 1987.

Most informative and most entertaining. Good illustrations.

Whitley, Gertrude. Old-Time Tools and Toys of Needlework. Dover Publications

Inc. New York. Reprint 1971. Originally published in 1928 under the title, Tools and Toys of Stitchery. Rather flowery prose used, but a most informative chapter intitled Beautiful Bobbins. Quite good illustrations. Has some interesting glass bobbins.

Wright, Thomas The Romance of the Lace Pillow. H.H.Armsrtong. Olney 1919. Reprinted Ruth Bean Carlton 1982.

Quite the best book for those interested in the historical aspect of bobbins. Not strong on illustrations and when they do appear they are poor photographs, but the text is invaluable as a record of original source material.

Yallop H.J. 1992. The History of the Honiton Lace Industry. University of Exeter Press.

Certainly the most scholarly text available on the history of the lace industry. Concentrates on the Honiton industry but covers the whole of England. He puts forward a contrary theory to the origins of the lace history in England. Tends to discount the Protestant refugee theory and offers the "astute English businessman" theory.

There is an excellent chapter on Honiton bobbins and their decoration.

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